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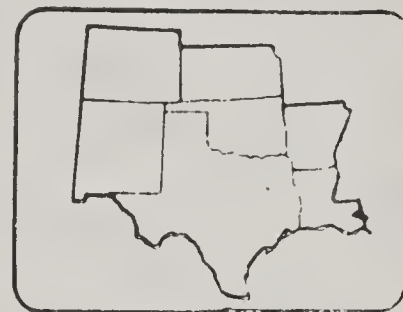
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**SOUTHWEST REGIONAL INFORMATION OFFICE**

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY SERVICE

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Canned Ham Patties Undergoing Special Tests in Illinois

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has initiated a special testing program of refrigerated canned ham patties processed by Agar Food Products, Co., of Chicago, Ill., to determine what caused approximately three percent of the cans to swell after production.

Sydney J. Butler, acting administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service (FSQS), emphasized that while no immediate health hazard appears to exist at this time, USDA is conducting additional tests on both normal-appearing and swollen cans to determine if any regulatory action is necessary. FSQS wanted consumers to be aware of this potential problem. USDA has been informed that the company has previously alerted its distributors and retailers to withdraw swollen cans from sale.

Swollen cans of ham patties have been found under the brand names Agar, Hamdingers, Country Club and Becker Foods. The company also packs canned ham patties under the brand names Food Club, Patrick Cudahy, Safeway, IGA and Plee-zing. The company's canned ham patties bear the establishment number "35" and are distributed in retail stores and institutions throughout the United States.

The product is sold in 16-, 42-, and 44-ounce cans, and the establishment number "35" is either printed on the label as part of the federal inspection mark or embossed on the cans lids.

According to Butler, FSQS meat inspection officials are finding above normal levels of Lactobacillus bacteria in approximately three percent of the refrigerated can of ham patties. These bacteria are not harmful to human health.

FSQS meat inspection personnel will continue to monitor plant production processes and test samples of the product to determine the cause of the problem. If tests show a health hazard is present, FSQS will act immediately to take the appropriate regulatory action.

